R.R. "Bob" Greive

R.R. "Bob" Greive began his political career in 1946 at the age of twenty-seven when he won his first election for the state Senate. A Democrat from West Seattle representing the Thirty-Fourth District, Greive quickly moved up in his party's leadership ranks. He was an active campaigner and fundraiser for fellow Democrats and ultimately served sixteen years as the Senate majority leader. Greive's attention to detail and dedication to his political goals also made him a master of the redistricting process. Over three decades he served as "Mr. Redistricting" for the Democrats in the Legislature.

Read the full text of an interview with Senator Greive, *R.R. "Bob" Greive: An Oral History*, on the Oral History Program's Web site.

me." If it was a Democratic meeting, they wanted to take the Democrats away and give us Republicans. Well, that's enough for them. You know what I mean? Or somebody would complain and say, "They wanted to cut you out of my district." "Oh, oh!" So, it wasn't that hard.

The bad part would be that you did terrible things to the ladies who cut out the paper dolls or who changed the world. That was the issue: were you or weren't you against the League of Women Voters? I'm certainly not against the League of Women Voters; I never have been. They certainly have got a place in the world and I think that they're doing generally a good thing. They probably did a good thing there, because without them we wouldn't have redistricted.

Somebody who brings up an issue and takes on the issue may not always succeed, but then they've got a real place in the history of the situation.

Ms. Boswell: Did you ever hear from them afterwards, the women themselves? How did they react?

Sen. Greive: When we tried the second one, they were all mixed up in the second one, too. Some of them became quite interested. Things run together, and I don't recall Lois North ever coming down the first time, but she certainly was down the second time when it was happening to her district. She ran for state representative or state senator and then King County Council. She had ambitions for a political career. Mary Ellen McCaffree did the same thing, and she was active in the second redistricting.

In this business, everybody's human. And when you get to how they are elected, they're awful human. Nobody wants to commit suicide, and nobody wants to give an advantage away that may help him or her achieve office. Now, what they do after they're in office is another story. But you're talking about getting elected.

Ms. Boswell: Well, it makes sense. If you were going to start your process with these individuals who were already in office, why would they fight their own election?

Sen. Greive: That's right. You try to give them a better deal than they had before. We tried to iron out some of the difficulties, but one thing that the ladies did is that they put up some horrible examples because there were great needs. It's easier to sell people on something when somebody else has done it. In other words, the problem was before them and they could see that you had to do something.

Just like we have to balance the budget now. Well, we haven't balanced the budget for what is it, twenty years? Maybe it will be another twenty years if somebody doesn't make an issue out of it. Once it's made an issue, then you begin to feel like you've got to tighten your belt, and you've got to do something. Now, do you want to do exactly what Newt Gingrich, the Speaker of the House, wants to do? But the question is that you've got to do something, and you can't knock people like that. Sometimes they do a service; they become part of the plan to solve the issue.

The hardest thing about redistricting is that there are individuals involved, and they get hurt. And then some people see a chance to achieve notoriety by attacking or by doing this or that because they know the newspapers will publish what they say. Anytime a politician thinks he's got a thing of sufficient importance or popularity, he's going to say all kinds of things because then he gets publicity out of it. It may not be the right thing to do.

This particular plan was easy to attack if we got to the facts, but we didn't get into the facts anymore than we had to because once we sold it, we just had to get it through. The

reason why it was so predominately Democratic was because of Initiative 198, "the right-to-work" initiative of 1956. We had two right-to-work initiatives here, and they were overwhelmingly defeated. They got thousands of people out to vote who would never have otherwise voted. There was a large turn-out. So the districts that were heavily Democratic because the Democrats had made big sweeps, and then the governor was a Democrat.

Ms. Boswell: So when the redistricting happened, it helped to solidify those Democrats?

Sen. Greive: Well, when they were all elected, then every one of them wanted to look at their districts. Even somebody elected for the first time has considerable interest in what we were going to do in this part of their district or another part, and how they carried it, and so forth. In other words, when we sat down and talked to my people after we developed our plan, why, we could tell them what the precincts were and we could tell them how we arrived at them. I don't remember at this point in my life, thirty or forty years removed, exactly what we did, but I know that our knowledge was vastly superior to theirs. We had actually looked at the thing and did the study. Then somebody comes in cold and just knows they got elected from Grant County. Well, that's easy because Grant County's a rural community, but if you're elected from Seattle then it goes all kinds of different ways, Democratic or Republican, depending on who you put in that district.

Ms. Boswell: Once you'd finished all this, did you think it was over and you wouldn't have to deal with it for another ten years?

Sen. Greive: I think so. I don't think I ever thought that far ahead. I started thinking of it ten years later, or whatever it was the next time around. It wasn't quite ten years.

I'd like to put on the record some of the other things that this bill did that the women concocted and I'm sure they didn't intend, but it turned out to be very difficult. First, we had two senators in Snohomish County at the time. Well, as the women were adjusting and drawing the borders, they put both of them in the same district. Now, that would have been one thing if they could have run against each other, but the more powerful of the two—the guy with the greater seniority—was Senator Bargreen. They chopped his term off in this way. His term would expire, but the number was on Bill Gissberg's district. They transferred it over, and it didn't expire for two years, so he had to be out of office for two years before he could run again for reelection. And that was just one of the mistakes that they made.

It's like putting the seven legislators in one district. What we did is pinpoint every legislator so we knew where the legislators were, and then we took that into consideration.

Then, I also said that there was some argument over the Cowlitz Dam.* It was Tacoma's dam, which they said they needed for public power purposes, but the fish people, especially the sportsmen, had said that they were cutting off the fish run. I was never a direct part of that controversy. I don't recall right now absolutely how I voted; I may have

**Editor's note: The Tacoma municipal power company wanted to build a dam on the Cowlitz River in adjacent Lewis County.*

voted with the sportsmen, but the fact remains that they made some sort of a deal in the House that I wasn't a part of, and that became a part of redistricting. The price for supporting the dam was to pass the redistricting bill.

Ms. Boswell: And that was to get Tacoma senators in particular?

Sen. Greive: Yeah. I think they would have gotten them anyway, but now forty years later, I can't tell you for sure.

Ms. Boswell: And then, what about the role of Governor Rosellini?

Sen. Greive: Governor Rosellini had said that he was for what the League of Women Voters had done. Governor Rosellini had said that he was for the initiative because he was running for re-election as governor at the same time, and he said that he supported it. He was in a very difficult position for a variety of reasons. Most of the legislators were for our plan, and he finally let it become law without his signature based on this rationale. He said that two-thirds of the people had voted for it, and they could have overridden his veto. However, there was not going to be another session for two years, and it would be too late for the next election—they'd have to use the other districts. So, he felt that the only fair thing to do was to let it stand, since it had such overwhelming support. His action made no difference anyway. He let it become law without his signature.

Ms. Boswell: You told me a great story about how you encouraged him along. Would you like to tell that story?

Sen. Greive: It seems that we were concerned about him signing it, so what we did—what I did really—was to get hold of the leaders. We got all of the legislators we could find who were on our side, and in this case it was close to a hundred—if it was two-thirds, then great. Well, we had a conference with the governor and when we opened the door, all of us trucked into the governor's office, but we couldn't all get in. And he was just shocked. There's a boardroom next to his office, and you could see all the faces.

I said to the governor, "Governor, about this veto of this legislation?" And he told us at that time that he wasn't going to veto it.

Ms. Boswell: That was an added incentive, all those people staring at him?

Sen. Greive: I'm sure that he had a lot of things that they wanted him to do, and it was the most difficult position for him to be in, but he gave a pretty good rationale, I thought.

Ms. Boswell: Was John O'Brien, at that time, heavily involved in this issue?

Sen. Greive: Yes. He was on our side. He was concerned because, of course, these were the people who elected him Speaker, just like we were. He was the Speaker, and he supported it. But I don't know that he played a very vital part in putting the plans together.

Gordon Sandison did more. He was the majority leader, and a fellow by the name of Robert Timm was the Republican leader, and was very heavily involved in it.

Ms. Boswell: And you said also that both Republican and Democratic organizations supported it?

Sen. Greive: Yes. First of all you have to understand that at that time the central committees of both parties were chosen one or two from each county, so it was not unusual that the small counties had a vote. So the Democratic and Republican central committees were both asked if they approved

of what we were doing and supported the changes, which gave us more cover. You could say that it didn't truly reflect their views. Maybe it did and maybe it didn't; we'll never know.

In King County they voted to support Initiative 199, but I don't think there were three people on that floor other than maybe the one or two of us, like Mike Gallagher and myself, who knew what it did. All they knew it was good for King County and gave us more representation. The Republicans, I think, were a good deal better informed. They unanimously supported it.

Now the Young Democrats also didn't support it, but that was because of a Young Democrat House member by the name of Andy Hess, who later became a senator from Ed Munro's district. He went before the Young Democrats and gave them a big speech and so forth, and as far as I know there was no opposition or no intelligent discussion of exactly what the district did. So he had the interest, and he got an awful good district.

Ms. Boswell: The League of Women Voters believed that the changes you made to the redistricting plan far exceeded the powers to amend an initiative granted to the Legislature. They filed suit in the state courts, but the state Supreme Court ultimately upheld your amendment. Can you tell me a little bit about that action?

Senator Greive: In the final analysis when this went to court, we had a funny situation.

George Prince was appointed as a special assistant attorney general and compensated by the Attorney General to bring the action, because the Attorney General never approved of what we were doing. Before the initiative the Attorney General was pretty much on the other side every chance he got. He was about to run for governor, and, in my opinion, was very prejudiced and wanted to be on the popular side.

Ms. Boswell: And that was John O'Connell?

Sen. Greive: Yes. From our point of view, we didn't, of course, agree with John O'Connell. He also got a chance to appoint the lawyers to defend the state, and he appointed Marshall Neill. Now Marshall Neill was a state senator. He was with us, and he eventually became a judge. I knew him very well, and he wasn't particularly an expert on constitutional matters and played little or no part in the thing. I objected to being in a position of having our own defender be from the state Senate. And so they finally agreed to name Lyle Iversen. I don't know whether they took Marshall Neill off or not, but basically Lyle Iversen had represented the election department from the attorney general's office in years gone by and was an expert in election matters; he handled our case. And that was because I asked them to. I went over and made an issue out of it.

Ms. Boswell: And so John O'Connell got involved enough to have Prince be the attorney for whoever sued?

Sen. Greive: Yes. Well, Prince's wife was very active in the League of Women Voters, and, interestingly, he also played a part in later redistricting actions.

After the redistricting battles of 1956 and 1957, the heated conflict surrounding redistricting cooled for a few years. But 1962 saw the reemergence of redistricting as a major divisive issue in Washington State politics, with new players and new pressures such as the involvement of district and federal courts.